signum CLASSICS

THE KING'S SINGERS

CLOSE HARMONY

CD1

1. **CROCODILE ROCK** Elton John arr. Andrew Jackman 04.05
2. **FATHER, FATHER** Laura Mvula, arr. Eric Whitacre, ad. Christopher Bruerton 04.59
3. **FIFTY WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER** Paul Simon, arr. Andrew Jackman 03.15
4. **THE HILLS OF ABERFELDY** Ed Sheeran and Foy Vance. arr. Jim Clements 04.08
5. **GOOD OLD-FASHIONED LOVER BOY** Queen, arr. Nick Ashby 03.17
6. **THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT** Jerome Kern, arr. John Rutter 02.27
7. **OH! I CAN'T SIT DOWN** George and Ira Gershwin, arr. Bob Chilcott 02.47
8. **HOW LONG WILL I LOVE YOU?** Mike Scott, arr. Christopher Bruerton 02.30
9. **OB-LA-DI, OB-LA-DA** John Lennon and Paul McCartney, arr. Daryl Runswick 04.31
10. **SHE MOVED THROUGH THE FAIR** Traditional, arr. Daryl Runswick 03.30
11. **I'M A TRAIN** Albert Hammon, arr. Peter Knight 02.06
12. **MEET YOU IN THE MAZE** James Blake 05.53
13. **RAINBOW** Kacey Musgraves, arr. Pat Dunachie 02.33
14. **FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE** Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, arr. Daryl Brunswick 01.21
15. **SLOW TRAIN** Donald Swann, arr. Gordon Langford 03.32
16. **HONEY PIE** John Lennon and Paul McCartney, arr. Paul Hart 02.47

Total: 53.43

CD2

1. **RHYTHM OF LIFE** Cy Coleman, arr. Peter Knight 02.17
2. **CREOLE LOVE CALL** Duke Ellington, arr. Paul Kuhn 03.33
3. **SISOTOWBELL LANE** Joni Mitchell, arr. Pat Dunachie 04.47
4. **UNE GENTE BERGÈRE (A KIND SHEPHERDESS)** Traditional, arr. Geoff Richards 02.56
5. **WHEN I'M 64** John Lennon and Paul McCartney, arr. Paul Hart 03.31
6. **SHE'S LIKE THE SWALLOW** Traditional, arr. Bob Chilcott 04.35
7. **OVERTURE TO THE BARBER OF SEVILLE** Gioachino Rossini, arr. Daryl Brunswick 03.28
8. **TAKEDA LULLABY** Traditional, arr. Grayston Ives 03.19
9. **PENNY LANE** John Lennon and Paul McCartney, arr. Bob Chilcott 02.43
10. **SONGBIRD** Christine McVie, arr. Nick Ashby 03.22
11. **SEASIDE RENDEZVOUS** Queen, arr. Paul Hart 02.39
12. **THE ROSE** Amanda McBroom, arr. Nic Raine 03.39
13. **SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW** Harold Arlen, arr. George Shearing 06.08
14. **MASTER-PIECE (2024)** Paul Drayton 12.17
15. **WHAT KIND OF THINGS DO THE KING'S SINGERS SING?** Ron Goodwin, arr. Jeremy Jackman 02.00

Total: 01.01.15

Due to the copyright status of most songs, printing the lyrics in the booklet was not possible

An introduction to Close Harmony

This album takes a deep-dive into one of the most beloved and unique corners of our music library: our close-harmony arrangements. It's a recording that combines newly-recorded material with highlights from the four volumes of our *The Library* EP series, which we've released over the last six years.

The close-harmony genre came out of semi-accident, initially - there wasn't enough classical repertoire immediately appropriate for the original line-up of voices to fill a whole concert. The unexpected combination of serious and lighter repertoire delighted audiences, though, and quickly became central to The King's Singers' identity. The specific sound of these new arrangements gave the 'close-harmony' style its name: voice parts are often singing in tightly-knit spacings, creating a blended, unified group sound that's become recognisable ever since our predecessors pioneered it. Our group was essentially the first British vocal group to programme concerts with this range of genres and styles, and so 'close-harmony' was how we described the lighter part of each programme.

The newer songs on this album reflect the cultural landscape that our line-up has lived in since 2019. Our choices have been inspired by major musical biopics, groundbreaking new albums, projects rooted in the COVID pandemic, and other musical anniversaries. We feel it's our responsibility to reflect this cultural landscape, as well as to cherish and celebrate wonderful arrangements from the group's early years. This *Close Harmony* album is our chance to tell the group's story, specifically through the viewfinder of this magical close harmony repertoire.

The early years: Gordon Langford, Peter Knight and Daryl Runswick

The group's very first recording, released in 1971, was imaginatively called *The Original Debut Recording.* It featured collaborations with The Gordon Langford Trio (Gordon being one of the great early arrangers for the group and a jazz pianist in his own right). This album was later re-released as *By Appointment* in 1973, once the group had made the transition into full-time professional touring. The closing track on that album was a sweet, tongue-in-cheek and chintzy self-referential song written by Ron Goodwin and arranged by Gordon, called *What kind of things do The King's Singers sing?* It was a handy calling-card in the days when the idea of a multi-genre ensemble was basically enigma. The song received a few outings on television, but hasn't been sung much in the years since. We thought this was the perfect occasion to revive it. Also arranged by the great Gordon Langford, and released on an album a few years later in 1977, is *The Slow Train* — a song by the English comedy duo Flanders and Swann that laments the closure of railway stations across the UK as part of the Beeching cuts in 1963. The song captured a spirit of national disappointment in these closures and what they signalled for rural life, and conveys a deep nostalgia quite unlike anything else in our library. Also on the ever-ripe theme of trains comes *I'm a train* — an eccentric song from 1967 by the British-Gibraltarian singer and songwriter Albert Hammond, describing the hard life of a locomotive. It was arranged by Peter Knight and released on the popular album *Lollipops* (1975), going on to become one of our highest-selling sheet music arrangements. Another song from *Lollipops* that's frequently cited as the most difficult and bizarre close harmony arrangement in our library, is Daryl Runswick's *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da*. He turned The Beatles' whimsical original into a fantasia complete with Cossack dancing, operatic flights of fancy and any constant key changes and interpolations. It's not been performed for decades, given its difficulty, but we were determined to give it a new lease of life on this album. Also by Daryl Runswick, but displaying a totally different musical approach, is *She moved through the fair* - a wonderful Irish folk song that was first found and notated in County Donegal. The melody has a haunting, timeless quality that Daryl's arrangement captures, andThe group first recorded it on *Watching the White Wheat* - a 1985 album of British folk songs.

Also released in 1985 was *A Tribute to The Comedian Harmonists*. This German interwar male-voice sextet had been a huge influence on the early generations of The King's Singers. Their tongue-in-cheek musical humour which had captured the Weimar Republic had a real resonance with the lighter side of King's Singers concerts, and this album was a recognition

of that influence, with Daryl adapting and remoulding many of their most famous songs for The King's Singers. *Overture to the Barber of Seville* has become one of the most recognisable tracks, particularly with our former countertenor Jeremy Jackman's hilarious delivery of the infamous vocalisation 'tiddly poo' (for which he claims he was recognised in the street as 'Mr. Tiddly Poo' after performing it on television). In a similar mould of 'vocalised' classical works, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* is given a characteristically hilarious treatment, as is Duke Ellington's *Creole Love Call*, which tests the limits of our mimickry, impersonating muted trumpets, plucked strings, saxophones and all sorts.

Three more of the tracks on *Close Harmony* come from the refining fire of the 1980s, as the group's public profile matured and albums flowed. In 1980 they released *New Day,* one of whose tracks is a virtuosic Peter Knight arrangement of *The Rhythm of Life* — from Cy Coleman's musical *Sweet Charity*. An arrangement that we particularly enjoyed learning for this recording was John Rutter's take on Jerome Kern's *The way you look tonight*. No one can quite work out precisely when it was written (it was some time in the eighties), but it's a masterful example of arranging: simple yet sumptuous, and full of the pathos of the original song. We do however know that *Une gente bergere* came from around 1986 when the group recorded À La Française, an album that included *Carnival of the Animals* and Goff Richards' wonderful set of five *Songs from the Auvergne*, a set of beautiful (and in a couple of cases pretty fiendish) arrangements.

Bill, Bob and The Beatles

Takeda Lullaby is an ancient Japanese folk song with its roots in the city of Kyoto. It's sung in the voice of a poor woman who's had to move away from her home to work for a rich family. It elicits such beautiful responses in Japan that it's become close to our hearts, as we've started to visit Japan regularly again. Grayston (Bill) Ives arranged it — alongside lots of other fantastic arrangements — while he was tenor in the group in the 1970s and 80s. His successor as tenor in the group was Bob Chilott, who also made an extraordinary contribution to the group's library by way of compositions and arrangements. Bob spent much of his time on the road honing and perfecting his craft as a composer and we could easily fill a whole album just with arrangements he wrote during his tenure. But we've restricted ourselves to three on this album: from his folk song output, we've chosen *She's like the swallow*, a

Canadian song that alternates beautiful solo lines with the glowing choral textures. His love for percussive rhythmic lines and ostinati comes to the fore in his take on George Gershwin's *Oh! I can't sit down* (from a triumphal moment in his opera *Porgy and Bess* when the cast assembles to enjoy a picnic). On the group's 1986 album *The Beatles Connection*, Bob's now-famous arrangement of *Penny Lane* was selected as the opening track. This album was produced by The Beatles' own producer and collaborator George Martin, and so we like to think that something of the Fab Four's original spirit lives on through these arrangements.

Such was the quality of both the songs and the arranging for *The Beatles Connection* that several more feature on this album. The way Paul Hart reimagines The Beatles and Queen is always infused with musical comedy (sometimes understated, sometimes overstated…). His understanding of our group, our sound and our performative strengths set his arrangements as gems within our library. His take on *When I'm Sixty-Four* is packed with detail and eccentric instrumental impressions. Likewise, his *Honey Pie* takes a lesser-known Beatles song (from *The White Album* in 1968) and conjures up its nostalgic retrospection with 1940s-style swing band figures and a tongue-in-cheek flair. When the group initially learned this arrangement for performance on television, Alastair Hume (our original second countertenor) ended up swapping with Bob Chilcott and singing the solo line, such was his ability to tickle the audience with his storytelling (and his bowties)! Another beloved, funny arrangement by Paul Hart is *Seaside Rendezvous*, a musical curiosity written and sung by Freddie Mercury and released by Queen on *A night at the races* in 1975. The song tells of a desperate and slightly embarrassing attempt at courtship in the setting of an English seaside town, with the boy employing his best French and Italian catchphrases to try and impress an unimpressed girl. Its surreality reaches its peak when the group whips out kazoos for an instrumental break. Something of a 'companion' to this arrangement is Nick's 2020 version of *Good old-fashioned lover boy* - another Freddie Mercury invention, here graced by a guitar solo rendered on kazoo.

Eighties and Nineties

Despite all of this nostalgia, the group really was quite current in some of its close harmony choices during the 80s and 90s. At the height of Elton John's stardom, the group boldly went where no English choral group had gone before and commissioned an arrangement of his bluesy hit *Crocodile Rock*. Our version reaches a fit of madness, where in concert each member of the group starts to dance as the famous chorus melody repeats. On this strictly audio-only recording, the listener is spared. Another artist at peak-stardom during this time was Paul Simon, whose masterful songwriting and melancholic vocal style provided wonderful opportunities for close-harmony treatment. A wide range of his songs were reworked for us on several albums (including *America* in 1989 and *Good Vibrations* in 1992); *Fifty ways to leave your lover* is one that's really stood the test of time. It's unusual in our library for relying on vocal percussion to drive the rhythmic energy. It was arranged as part of a multi-song medley by Andrew Jackman, the brother of our former countertenor Jeremy Jackman. The next major close harmony-based album the group released after *Good Vibrations* was *Circle of Life* in 1996. One of the tracks was Amanda McBroom's song *The Rose* (made famous by Bette Midler); while they had intended to record an orchestrated version, they decided to strip it back during the sessions and record it as a very simple, voices-only arrangement. It's this version that survives in our library today, and which we recorded in 2019.

Somewhere over the rainbow is an unusual item on this album, as it features two instrumental collaborators. Liam Dunachie (Pat's brother) and Misha Mullov-Abbado joined us on piano and double bass to record Neil Richardson's arrangement of this iconic Harold Arlen song. The impetus for the arrangement was the group's 1991 album *Get Happy!* with pianist George Shearing. This new recording was particularly meaningful for us given the family connection, and the fact that many of us have adored Richardson's arrangement since we first heard it on the 1991 recording.

One piece in particular deserves its own paragraph: not just for its popularity amongst audiences, or its sheer length, but because it's the only full composition on *Close Harmony*. *Master-Piece* was written for the group by Paul Drayton in 1987, and aims to celebrate and also poke fun at the various styles of composers from throughout Western musical history. The piece starts with a pastiche of J. S. Bach, and through a sequence of composers new and old finds its way back eventually to Bach, with the final statement, 'Bach again'! It's become one of our most popular pieces worldwide after a video of a performance from 2004 went viral - and at our invitation before this recording, Paul made a few changes and additions to bring *Master-Piece* right up to date.

Recent times

This album wasn't simply an excuse to excavate our pre-existing close harmony songs; we have added a good number of our own contributions. The trick is not just to find the most popular songs and arrange them. It's to find songs with enough true musical value: beautifully crafted words, imaginative harmonic writing, and lyrical melodies, so that the song has a chance at life in a new format. And so, since 2019 we've collected and arranged several brand new songs, which we hope will become 'classics' of the future. One particularly fruitful evening for inspiration was the GRAMMY Awards ceremony in February 2019, when we were invited as nominated artists. Performing at that ceremony the night was James Blake — an extraordinary British singer, songwriter, DJ and producer, who had not long since released his album *The Colour in Anything*. Its final track, *Meet you in the maze*, is a tender song in which he electronically overlays his own voice six times in a style that perfectly fits our sound and ranges. Later that night, the country singer Kacey Musgraves gave the first live performance of her new song *Rainbow*. Listening to that premiere in Los Angeles, Pat was immediately struck by its message, simplicity and distinctive melodic line. He began writing his arrangement the very next day, on a plane from Los Angeles to Kansas City. Another song that caught his attention was Joni Mitchell's ballad *Sisotowbell Lane*. Hearing its unusual rhythms, its sepia-tinted half-rhymes and its wistful nostalgia for something imagined, he adapted it for us in 2021.

A defining episode during the period 2019-2024 was the COVID pandemic, which cruelly paused performing life for about 18 months. Despite its downsides, it provided a time for musical and technological experimentation and creativity unlike any other period in our history. Part of this was the chance to collaborate with other musicians online, and one such project involved the *Stay at Home Choir*: an extraordinary online musical community around the world brought together by a love of singing. With them, we recorded Nick's arrangement of Christine McVie's *Songbird* — a song he'd known and loved for years and which found new magic with the addition of thousands of singers from around the world. It's our King's Singers-only version that appears on this album, but in our memory the arrangement has its roots in that time. From the same period, we were inspired when we first heard Eric Whitacre's imaginative arrangement of Laura Mvula's *Father, Father* (from her award-winning 2013 album *Sing to the moon*). We asked for Eric's permission to rework his version for voice and it's become a beloved centrepiece in many concerts since.

Ellie's Goulding's song *How long will I love you?* was a favourite of our former second countertenor, Tim Wayne-Wright, and his wife Gemma. For their wedding in 2015, Chris arranged the song for members of the group to sing at their ceremony in New Zealand. And that brings us neatly on to the most recent song on *Close Harmony*. In March 2024, en route to New Zealand from China, we had to change planes in Hong Kong. We ate lunch at the airport and spotted tall, intimidating men sitting down to eat at the table next to ours. They were sitting with a man in a black and white cap, with striking ginger hair. On closer inspection, the ginger man was Ed Sheeran — one of the great singer-songwriters of the modern age. None of us quite mustered the courage to introduce ourselves, nor to play him our version of *The Hills of Aberfeldy* - the closing track from his 2023 album, *Subtract*. As soon as *Subtract* was released, we had identified *Hills* as a great candidate for an arrangement and tasked our friend Jim Clements to work on it. What emerged was a beautiful, still, and haunting version of a song that somehow feels timeless, despite its modern origins.

The King's Singers
Patrick Dunachie countertenor, **Edward Button** countertenor
Julian Gregory tenor, **Christopher Bruerton** baritone
Nick Ashby baritone, **Jonathan Howard** bass

Instrumentalists
Liam Dunachie piano, **Misha Mullov-Abbado** double bass

"Astonishing, exhilarating musicianship"

GRAMOPHONE

THE KING'S SINGERS have set the gold standard in a cappella singing on the world's greatest stages for over fifty years. They are renowned for their unrivalled technique, musicianship and versatility, which stem from both the group's rich heritage and its drive to bring an extraordinary range of new and unique works, collaborations and recordings to life. The King's Singers' extensive discography has led to numerous awards, including two Grammy Awards, an Emmy Award, and a place in Gramophone magazine's inaugural Hall of Fame.

Over the course of 2023, the group has released three diverse, collaborative albums that showcase the breadth of their repertoire. One marks 400 years since the deaths of two great Renaissance composers, Thomas Weelkes and William Byrd. Another celebrates their body of commissioned music, including the six *Nonsense Madrigals* written for the group by György Ligeti (who would have turned 100 in 2023). And the third honours 100 years of Disney, with almost thirty brand-new arrangements of songs from its iconic films.

Growing the global canon of choral music has always been one of the group's key aims, and The King's Singers have now commissioned more than 200 works by many of the most prominent composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. These composers include John Tavener, Joe Hisaishi, Judith Bingham, Eric Whitacre, György Ligeti, Luciano Berio, Krzysztof Penderecki and Toru Takemitsu. All of this new music joins their unique body of close-harmony and a cappella arrangements, including those by individual King's Singers past and present.

The King's Singers were officially formed in 1968 when six recent choral scholars from King's College, Cambridge gave a concert at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. By chance, the group was made up of two countertenors, a tenor, two baritones and a bass, and the group has stuck to this singular formation ever since that debut.

Alongside their demanding performing and recording schedule – with over 100 concerts worldwide every season – the group also leads educational workshops and residential courses across the globe, working with both ensembles and individuals on their approaches to group singing. To mark their 50th anniversary in 2018, they founded The King's Singers Global Foundation in the USA to provide a platform to support the creation of new music across multiple disciplines, to coach a new generation of performers, and to provide musical opportunities to people of all backgrounds.

Thanks and acknowledgments

There are a great many people to thank for helping us bring this album into existence over several years. Firstly, we must acknowledge the extraordinary legacy left for us by former generations of King's Singers. From the very earliest days right up to our direct predecessors, each one has helped to preserve and grow our close harmony repertoire.

Another important thank you goes to the team at Signum Classics: Steve, Matt, Kim, Darren, Matt, Georgia and everyone else who has supported us recording this body of material. Thanks also to the skilled and patient producers and engineers who have encouraged the best from us and captured it beautifully: Nick, Nigel, Mike, Tom, and Tom – recording sessions with you are always inspiring, entertaining and fulfilling. Behind the scenes, recording songs in foreign languages can be a challenge, but it has been made much easier by the lovely people who've patiently helped with language coaching — in particular Yoshimi for Takeda Lullaby and Perrine for Une gente bergere. Thanks also to Frances Marshall from Marshall Light Studio, whose photography is featured on the outside and inside of this booklet (and several others!). You truly capture our spirit.

Finally, we want to thank the many arrangers whose craft and skill has put so many great songs within our reach. Our line-up of voices is unusual, our musical tastes are diverse, so the role of the arranger in translating these songs into something we can perform is crucial. In particular, our respect goes to some of the early arrangers for the group: Gordon Langford, Goff Richards, Peter Knight, Daryl Runswick and Paul Hart. They're not all still around, but we owe each one of them a debt of gratitude.

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